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Viewing cable 08ATHENS148, GREECE/TURKEY: MFA TERMS KARAMANLIS VISIT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS148	2008-01-31 14:20	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000148

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SUBJECT: GREECE/TURKEY: MFA TERMS KARAMANLIS VISIT
"POSITIVE" BUT "NOT CONCRETE" --CORRECTED COPY:--

REF: ANKARA 173

ATHENS 00000148 001.2 OF 002

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) MFA officials termed PM Karamanlis' January 23 - 25 trip to Turkey "positive but not concrete." They were pleased by statements by PM Erdogan that "could be seen as positive openings" on the status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, on the Aegean "casus belli," and on broader Aegean issues. Furthermore, the two sides had "frank and positive" exchanges on Turkey's EU prospects (and Greek support for it); illegal migration; freedom of religion issues -- emphasizing the issues of the Patriarchate's status and Halki Seminary; Aegean issues -- with an agreement to give new impetus to the bilateral "exploratory talks; and Cyprus. From the Greek MFA perspective, the major deliverable was the visit itself -- with no major hiccups or crises. As the MFA Deputy Director for Turkey put it, "Now we can have more normal high-level exchanges." End Summary.

A Further Step Towards Normalcy

¶2. (C) A/Political Counselor met January 30 with MFA Turkey Desk officials, led by A-4 Directorate for Turkey Deputy Director Katerina Natsika. Natsika said the MFA saw the Karamanlis visit as "positive but not concrete." The key point was that the meeting took place, that there had been no crises during the visit, and it was now much easier for senior Greek and Turkish officials to have "dialogue" without a prior requirement for deliverables.

Three "Openings"

¶3. (C) Natsika said the GoG saw three "positive signals" on key issues from PM Erdogan during the trip. The Greeks see all three signals as an "opening" for further discussions:

-- Ecumenical Patriarchate: PM Erdogan said publicly that the question of the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate was "something that affects the Orthodox community" and not something that concerns the Turkish state itself. The Greeks will be pursuing with the Turks what this means in practice.

-- Casus Belli: Although PM Erdogan did not refer to Greece's long-standing request that the Turkish National Assembly rescind its 1996 resolution that any Greek decision to extend maritime territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles would be a "casus belli," he did make a "vague" and "positive" reference to this issue by stating both publicly and privately that "resorting to the threat of the use of force should not be the rule for international relations." Natsika said Athens will "try to stretch this statement to the extreme" in engaging with Turkey on its long-standing request to withdraw the "casus belli."

-- Aegean Issues: PM Erdogan openly referred to the issue of the delineation of the continental shelf, without referring to the broader range of Aegean issues that Turkey usually raises in that context. He also said that the question of the continental shelf could be resolved by "resorting to law." The Greeks have long held that the various disputed issues in the Aegean are primarily based on questions related to exploitation of resources, and that these disputes could best be solved through an agreed delineation of the continental shelf. The Greeks have also maintained that if the question of the continental shelf cannot be solved bilaterally, then the two sides should resort to international law through requesting a ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. Until now, Turkey has sought a political approach to these issues by insisting that the agenda include a wider range of issues

than just the continental shelf and demurring on the question of resorting to the ICJ. Natsika said senior Greek officials saw PM Erdogan's comments as leaning slightly closer to Greece's position, and said that this would be discussed further in upcoming bilateral talks (more below).

The Agenda - No Surprises or Breakthroughs

¶4. (C) The MFA Turkey team identified the following items has having been on the agenda:

-- Turkey's EU Prospects: PM Karamanlis reiterated Greek support for Turkey's "full" accession to the EU. PM Erdogan asked for this position to "continue and be more forceful." Karamanlis underscored the need for a clear political commitment on freedom of religion, minority rights, and good neighborly relations. He also said that the additional protocol must be fully implemented.

-- Illegal Migration: PM Karamanlis highlighted the importance Greece attaches to this problem, and asked for better implementation of the bilateral protocol on readmission. He also asked that Turkey be "more forthcoming" in its negotiations with the EU on a readmission agreement, noting that Greece receives the bulk of illegal migrants coming to the EU from/through Turkey. The two PMs agreed that Greek and Turkish "experts" would meet in Athens in mid-February to identify areaQ the issue of the status of the Patriarchate in Istanbul. MFA sources reiterated that Greece does not ask that Turkey recognize the Patriarchate as ecumenical, but that it not prohibit the Patriarchate from using this title and not interfere in "what are solely religious matters." Karamanlis also reiterated Greece's request that the Halki Seminary be reopened. On Halki, the Greeks said that "no progress" was achieved. Erdogan repeated previous assurances that Turkey was carefully reviewing this issue and would come back to Athens with "concrete proposals" at a later date. A Turkish Embassy representative in Athens told us that the Turkish proposal is and will continue to be to affiliate Halki with a Turkish university, something the Greeks and the Patriarchate have Ecumenical ostensibly ruled out.

-- Aegean Issues: Karamanlis made the point that he had not visited the National Assembly because of the "casus belli" decision. Karamanlis also requested that Turkey "end the publication of erroneous and misleading information" on the Turkish Ministry of Defense website about Aegean violations. Erdogan did not respond on this point. However, the two PMs did agree that the bilateral "exploratory talks" should be assessed. There have been 37 rounds of the "exploratory talks" with little concrete outcome. The two PMs agreed that the negotiators should develop a joint assessment for the two PMs of what the talks have achieved and how they can be given further impetus.

-- Cyprus: Both sides repeated "known positions." The Greeks felt no progress was made.

-- Economic Ties: The Turkish side raised interest in greater use of air transport lanes (Athens - Istanbul/Ankara and Thessaloniki - Istanbul/Ankara) and sea transport lanes (Kavala to Izmir and Thessaloniki to Izmir). These issues have been remanded to a bilateral "Steering Committee" that meets every four months at the level of MFA Political Directors. The Greeks also termed PM Karamanlis' Istanbul event with Greek and Turkish businessmen a "great success."

-- Expo 2015: Apparently overruling advice from his own Government, Karamanlis told Erdogan that Greece would support Izmir's bid to host Expo 2015 (Note: MFA officials said the GoG recommendation to Karamanlis had been to support Milan's bid. End Note).
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